

ADDICTION

SUMMIT



From Living in Addiction to Working with Addicts

Guest: Karen Willock

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Dr. Paul Thomas: Welcome to this episode of the Addiction Summit. I'm Dr. Paul, your host. It is my pleasure and privilege to introduce to you Karen Willock. She's a nurse. She's been a certified drug and alcohol counselor for 34 years. She's certified in the 20 Concepts, childhood attachment trauma. She's working for Wisdom and Recovery in that journey there. And she's been a clinical supervisor for Treehouse—it's a men's recovery program—for a long time, and investigator for the ethics complaints for alcohol and drug counselor certification board. And she runs a group for recovering impaired physicians for the past 25 years.

I'd be one of those physicians that she might have run a group for. I just want to thank you for being here. I just can't wait for you to share, maybe just start with your story from childhood, and let's take it from there.

Karen Willock: Ok, thank you Paul. Thank you for asking me to be here. I'm going to do a little different slant than all that I've ever done. It's where my passion for this comes from. For recovery, for families recovering. I am a child of two alcoholics. I became an alcoholic and addict. I have three sons that are alcoholics and addicts. And I've worked in the field of addiction.

So from my very first breath, ever, probably before that, because my mom was very late stage alcoholic. By the time I was born, she was in her 40s. Alcohol, alcoholism, drug addiction, food addiction, codependency, or raising kids that are addicted, or working in the field, my entire journey has been either in the disease or in the recovery process, which is kind of me. I'm kind of either one or the other. I'm not a half-measure kind of gal.

So both of my folks were alcoholics. My dad, kind of a strange. He was in the Korean War. Came back. Nobody really knows. In those generations, I'm 67. So in that generation, they didn't talk about what was going on.

So he had obvious war wounds. He has shrapnel. He also had some war wounds from my mother. The one that just came to mind, they were very, very violent people. Very angry. He was so tremendously angry.

It was such a paradox with him. He was 20, 25 years younger than my mom. So my mom was in her 40s and he was years, maybe even months younger than my oldest sister.

So he was very immature and a very bad, chronic alcoholic. He was raised by alcoholics himself. His dad was. My mom's father died of alcoholism. It just goes back generations in my family, the addiction.

Dr. Paul: So your early childhood sounds a little chaotic.

Karen: It was very chaotic.

Dr. Paul: Like abuse.

Karen: Abuse. Lots of abuse. Lots of fighting. My dad was violently angry, with my mom in particular. When you think back—and I know it's not unique—whenever you have alcoholism or drug addiction in a family, it's not unusual to have violence, whether it's silent violence, which can be as powerful, or it's physical. And my dad was a physical person.

And that's the memory that came back. My dad had apparently, I was raised at the L and J Bar in Omaha, Nebraska. And I was talking with a client a couple of weeks ago, and he was talking about the bar he was raised at. I had a bar I was raised at. I spent more time at that bar than I did at home.

Dr. Paul: At what age?

Karen: Oh my gosh. From small, where you can barely look out a window.

Dr. Paul: How were you at the bar at that age?

Karen: Back in my time.

Dr. Paul: You can bring your kids?

Karen: Absolutely. I was raised at the L and J Bar.

Dr. Paul: Wow. I had no idea you could do that.

Karen: Yeah. With Big Jim and all of his nonsense. Oh my gosh, I lived in such a fantasy world back then, just trying to survive. Because little kids are so confused, when they're in an environment where people are hitting each other. People are yelling and screaming.

And my role in the family was to keep my dad from killing my mom.

Dr. Paul: What a big responsibility.

Karen: It was outside my abilities. I often now, of course, now looking back, I look back and I think, what happened to these two people? Because nobody sets out to have kids and destroy them.

Dr. Paul: Yeah.

Karen: That's not the plan. You don't get married to somebody, stand in front of a judge or a minister, and pledge yourself and then know that you're going to go beat them to death almost.

There were beatings in my house where my dad beat my mom so bad, she ended up in the hospital more than once. Like many people, one of the reasons I got into studying childhood trauma, is the lack of memories in certain parts.

Dr. Paul: Block it out.

Karen: Yeah. I remember him waking up and throwing her on the floor repeatedly. Had ripped all of her clothes off. She was terrible. I was yelling at him to stop. He would tell me to go get Katherine, who lived across the street

from us, for help. And somehow Katherine was able to calm him down. I never quite understood that.

But then I'd go to leave, and he would throw me against the wall. So, there was no, until it took its course. Lying to the neighbors that the reason we were spending the night was they were in a car accident, but our car was fine. And my parents, my mom was in the hospital.

So this is what happened for me. I'm watching this unfold in front of me. These violent outbursts. The one scar on my dad's chest, he apparently had gone out with this woman, and my mom had found her glasses in the car. And when he walked in the door, I'm standing on the one side of the kitchen. She picks up a pan of hot grease and throws it at him. And he had a scar on his chest that encompassed his whole chest.

I can't remember for the life of me what happened after that. But I remember that happening. So what happened for me and what happens for many, many people and why I do what I do is that you end up leaving the whole world. And you become a person alone. And that's what happened to me.

Dr. Paul: Right. You had nothing safe to return to.

Karen: Right. Nothing there.

Dr. Paul: So you're on your own.

Karen: Right. Making deliberate decisions, even as a young child, to not count on anybody. Don't trust anybody. Don't want anything. Don't need anything for sure.

So the time like when my mom was in the hospital after he had beat her so frightfully. I was sitting at the bottom of the bed. He comes in and he kisses her, and it's like nothing happened. And everybody I know that other people who have grown up in homes just like that, that's what happens. You're sitting there looking, wondering, and they're fine.

Dr. Paul: Pretending like nothing happened.

Karen: Like nothing happened. So you get a child who is in that kind of an atmosphere. No safety. No safe place. No companionship. No guidance.

Dr. Paul: You wouldn't bring people home to your house growing up.

Karen: No. Matter of fact, I had friends. Not many of them, but friends that we would check out which house was the best for the night.

Dr. Paul: Wow.

Karen: So what happened then is what happens for so many people. You figure out a way to survive. One of my big escapes from the very beginning was food. And I remember, back in the day, putting my dad's beer bottles in the refrigerator. Our refrigerator was out in the utility room, and I'd be putting the beer bottles in the refrigerator and eating out of the refrigerator as a very young child. And eating whatever. It really didn't matter. Just wanting so badly to just get out of there, just somehow separate from that house.

Dr. Paul: I bet. Probably at a young age.

Karen: Yeah, at a very young age. And I was going to school. It's hard to study when you have stuff like that going on at home. It's difficult to, sometimes when I look back. I was thinking on the way here today. I thought, how do you ever explain living in a war zone, recovering from that, and entering into a life that you didn't think was possible. How do you explain that?

Dr. Paul: It's miraculous.

Karen: It's, yeah. I used to say it took a lot of years to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. My mom also had Addison's disease. She had some surgeries that I'd later read when I was in nurse's training, where they had made a mistake where they had cut a nerve that creating dumping syndrome, it's called. So she didn't absorb anything. So she weighed like 62, 68 pounds when she died. She was just...

Dr. Paul: Wow. Skin and bones.

Karen: Skin and bones. And alcoholic.

Dr. Paul: How old were you when she died?

Karen: I was 17.

Dr. Paul: Oh, so very young.

Karen: Yeah.

Dr. Paul: And your dad was still living, I presume.

Karen: Yeah. And he died Thanksgiving when I was about 26.

Dr. Paul: So he was super young.

Karen: Yeah, he was very young.

Dr. Paul: From his alcoholism?

Karen: Yes. Well, he fell in... remember I lived in Omaha, Nebraska. So he fell in a snow bank and laid there, I'm not sure how many hours. Because in South Omaha, there's a bar on every corner. You don't necessarily have to cross the street to get to a bar. But he must have left the bar, fell in a snow bank, and laid there for I don't know how long.

Dr. Paul: Just froze to death.

Karen: Right. He lived for a little bit. He was in the hospital. And I flew back from here. It was one of the times I got clean because I wanted to remember it. And if I was drinking or using, I wasn't sure I'd remember.

Dr. Paul: So your drinking and using started when?

Karen: When I was 14.

Dr. Paul: 14.

Karen: The very first drug I used was heroin.

Dr. Paul: Oh, you just went right to heroin.

Karen: Yes.

Dr. Paul: Why mess around with that other stuff?

Karen: I smoked pot twice in my life, and I didn't like it either time. I did it twice to be sure. So I was working. Back then you've got what was called a work permit.

Dr. Paul: At 14.

Karen: Mm-hmm, which allowed you to go ahead and work. So I went to work. And I've always been a hard worker. I wanted out, right?

Dr. Paul: Right.

Karen: So I went to work at this dairy. And the gal that I worked with did heroin. She was a lot older than I was. And that's where I started. And obviously, I didn't start shooting heroin. I mean, the first time I used that's how I used. But she did it. And then from there, it went on.

I went through nurse's training, and I was addicted to opioids. I did drugs for a living. So what that looked like for me is that's all I did. You get these things from social security where it shows from here to here.

Dr. Paul: Yeah, your income.

Karen: Well, so from the time I graduated from high school in 1969 until 1984, I maybe made a couple thousand dollars here and there.

Dr. Paul: It was all under the table stuff.

Karen: It was all under the table. It didn't look like I was doing anything. My first son, David, was born addicted to heroin. He's 40. He weighed 5 pounds. I had no idea how to be a mother. They handed me this little guy, and that's really been the ticket for me, my kids.

I don't think, I know. I didn't have enough self-esteem or desire to live to have done much for myself. And you hear that a lot. People say you can't change for anybody else. That's really not true. People like me, the kind of addict I was, the trash I lived in, the places I lived, the things I did to get drugs. The things I did to other people.

My kid, we lived 22 places in 6 years. We moved 22 times. He was in the 6th grade and couldn't read.

Dr. Paul: Wow. What years were those? As far as your age.

Karen: I got clean when I was 33. So David was born in 1970, so I was 20. So it was in those 13 years.

Dr. Paul: You had a 19-year run of heroin. That's a lot of heroin.

Karen: That's a long time.

Dr. Paul: That's a long time.

Karen: It's a long time.

Dr. Paul: How the heck did you kick that?

Karen: I actually did it in a basement is how I got clean. I got rescued by a bunch of Christians. And one of them just passed away not long ago, and she was the first friend I ever had at 33. I had my first friend.

So what happened for me was a step-daughter had been murdered by a 14-year-old girl. This was in 1980. And I made a decision at that time. It was kind of for me, the last straw, the last thing that was going to happen in my life that somebody got away with it.

I got clean, to do this girl some harm was my plan. And I knew in order to do that I needed to not be using or drinking. Because if I was using and drinking, I wouldn't do it. I was living in a commune off of Northeast Knot. Upstairs was three levels, and way at the top were the really good people. Middle floor was for everybody else. And the bottom floor, two of my future husbands were in that basement with me.

All the drug addicts were on the bottom floor. I remember two of us were stealing prescriptions from the same person. And I'm wondering who is stealing besides me? So that's got me into a community-based recovery program. And I had no intentions of staying. No intentions.

Dr. Paul: Yeah. You wanted revenge.

Karen: Yeah. That's all. I wasn't there to be good. I wasn't there to be rocketed into sainthood. I was simply there to stay clean long enough to take care of this. So she was sent, because she was an adolescent, she was sent back to a place on the east coast. And they kept her there, that was in 84. And by 88 she was out, because she was 18.

And I don't follow her anymore. I did for a lot of years because she continued to cause harm to other people and was incarcerated for a while, and so on. But it was just like the final pain. I don't know. There's so much agony that goes into living with parents that are so insanely angry and drunk.

And then I recreated the pain in my own life. And then I brought a kid into it. And I remember when they handed me David, he was this little 5-pound baby. I looked at him, and said, “I will teach you how to get them before they get you.” That’s what I thought I had to teach.

Dr. Paul: Right. Because they didn’t teach you. You didn’t know what to do.

Karen: Right. I didn’t know what to teach. So he was born. Those were really awful years. I drug him through so many different things. And any woman who has used those kind of drugs, of course meth, and all the different drugs that go with that, I just exposed that kid to things that he never should have seen or lived around. It’s that simple.

He’s got almost 7 years in recovery now, himself. And I’ll see him tomorrow morning.

Dr. Paul: Nice. So, I think you were telling me, before we started this interview, that this is the first Mother’s Day you’re going to see him.

Karen: Not him. I have three sons, and they’re all addicts. David is the oldest, and he’s recovery. Joe is new in recovery. He was MIA for almost 9, 10 years. Most of that time I had no contact with him. And I was just talking to him before I came here. Because we’re going to go out to dinner with him. They’re just rebuilding. They’re living the life I lived. And it’s agony to watch it.

Dr. Paul: Oh, it must be.

Karen: Yeah. Sorry.

Dr. Paul: No, this is tough stuff folks. When you go back and relive childhood stuff. This woman has worked with two of my family members. I’ll give you a break and tell on you a little bit. Our life is sort of an open book, because one of my family members is on YouTube and just puts it all out there. And the other one is my wife, and she’s in the book, *The Addiction Spectrum*, that’s sort of what caused this whole summit.

My wife also had some childhood trauma stuff. Not nearly the stuff you had to go through. But significant in a very big way. You can’t compare trauma, right?

Karen: Right. It’s all trauma.

Dr. Paul: It's all trauma. And she's been traumatized from childhood, and carrying it, and going to counseling for years. Decades. I had a different childhood. It wasn't that difficult, honestly. I was very blessed. And I kept wondering, because I didn't understand. Why can't you just work through this, is what I was wondering. You're in counseling for 15 years, every week.

Karen: Right. "Get over it."

Dr. Paul: Yeah, I'm thinking, "Get over it." Right? Well then she does this work for your childhood attachment trauma work that you do, with Wisdom and Recovery. She attended the intensive weekend workshop, which I think you were there.

Karen: Yeah. We have another one this coming weekend.

Dr. Paul: And she told me this, just the description of it. If you want to elaborate more on it, you can. But the culmination of having taken these classes where you go through The 20 Concepts that you teach. And in her case, going through this intensive workshop.

One of our other interviews is with Julie Valenti, who wrote the book. So you can go to that one as well. Anyway, she's telling me about this one exercise. And you were probably doing it and telling her...She's sitting in the middle of a small group, visualize yourself. Close your eyes. You're a little girl.

It gets me just thinking about. You compare your own little child. And she came back transformed, folks. Transformed. How does that happen?

Karen: That's the miracle. That's the reason that I share all that I shared. This that people are going through is not make believe. And it's not even the violence. It's the attachment to these two figures, mom and dad. This is where it starts, where it's a secure, safe.

Dr. Paul: It's supposed to be safe.

Karen: Yes. And your brain is wired from then on. And mine was wired to self-destruct. Just like I taught my kids how to. So for me, the agony. And I was thinking, what is addiction? Addiction is a thief. It steals your dignity, it steals people you love, it steals you from you. It steals your ability to show up. It steals everything. It is a thief.

There's a saying that says, "Extreme diseases call for extreme measures." And alcoholism, drug addiction, food addiction, violence, adult children of alcoholics, gambling, sexual addiction. All of these addictions are ways that we learn to take care of ourselves. It's where we go to hide our feelings. It's where we go to get well.

Dr. Paul: It's initially the solution.

Karen: Right. Why does a heroin addict say I need to get well? Right? Innately we know. There's something missing here. Let me share this first. I get into recovery from alcoholism. And alcohol really isn't my thing. It's really heroin. Heroin is a pain killer. Opiates are pain killers. Why in this day and age are so many people using opiates? Because people are in pain!

Dr. Paul: There's a lot of pain out there. You know it, if you're watching and your hurting. You know it.

Karen: Right. And most people are alone with it. And that's why. It's the only reason.

When I thought about coming here, I hate doing this stuff. Because it's so nerve wracking. But this is the reason. There is a way out. There is something you can do. But it takes tremendous commitment and effort. It's not magical thinking. It's not waving some little magical wand over yourself, and you're all better. It means you're going to get dedicated.

And most addicts, whatever they are addicted to, are dedicated to it. So you're either dedicated to the recovery process, or you're dedicated to the addiction. There is no middle of the road. There really isn't.

Dr. Paul: No. If you're addicted, you can't have just a little bit of your addictive substance. You're gone.

Karen: No. So the substances for me are controlling other people, playing God in everybody else's life. Even though I thought God was a jerk, I still wanted to be in control of everybody else's life. I know what's best for you.

Dr. Paul: Well your childhood was so out of control.

Karen: Right. I want to have control. Alcohol, I lived with alcoholics. Alcoholics are so alcoholic. Heroin did it for me. Opioids did it for me. And then the other substance is grain and sugars.

Dr. Paul: Tell us more about that. I think your story is, you are actually living a life of recovery and helping others.

Karen: Yeah.

Dr. Paul: You've worked in the addiction field.

Karen: By accident. Right off the bat.

Dr. Paul: Right off the bat. And you're good at it. I can tell you folks, because I've witnessed the results of incredible work. But then your own journey took a little detour there with food.

Karen: Right. Food for me is just like, I'm an alcoholic with the food. I would eat in secret. I would eat until I was so full I couldn't swallow anymore. I was extremely obese. I would make a decision in the morning to not eat, and be eating before noon.

Dr. Paul: I did that with alcohol for 13 years. I knew I was an alcoholic, I needed to quit. And every morning, “I’m done. That’s it.”

Karen: Right. Never going to do that again.

Dr. Paul: Nope. And by evening, guess what? Car goes right to the liquor store.

Karen: I was having a really hard time with the fact that I was able to get away from heroin. Because when I got into recovery with the food, I was 25 years clean and sober. So here I am, 25 years away from that, obese and dying from food. I had such a hard time thinking, this is what is going to kill me?

I started doing some investigating. And we know what we eat has a profound impact on us. So in that journey, I started figuring out that when I ate certain substances, I would want more.

Dr. Paul: Those things triggered, kind of like alcohol.

Karen: A physical craving. What’s alcohol made out of? Grains and sugar. What did I want? Grains and sugar. Throw in a little fat, and you’ve got a donut. Right? I didn’t overeat broccoli.

Dr. Paul: I don’t know anybody that’s addicted to broccoli.

Karen: No. So, I started trying different things. When I looked at it, there’s 33 different programs I tried.

Dr. Paul: 33. In all substances?

Karen: With food.

Dr. Paul: Oh, just for food?

Karen: Yeah! Finding a solution to the alcohol and drugs was easier than the food.

Dr. Paul: Oh my word. Well, I’ve often thought. Because I’ve struggled with food, but I don’t think, well, I know not to the extent. I still want to hear your story where I’ve heard you were killing yourself with food. But I struggled with it a lot. I always thought, with alcohol, when I finally conquered that, it was an

absolute. But you can't be absolute with food. You have to eat to survive. So I'm thinking, that makes it tough.

Karen: Right. It does make it tough. And actually alcoholics still drink substances, they just don't drink alcohol.

Dr. Paul: True.

Karen: So we all have to continue to engage with different fluids, or foods.

Dr. Paul: That's a good point.

Karen: This is what happened for me. In 2003, I had tried, again, another commercial food program. And I'd lose a little weight. And at that time, I was almost 300 pounds. So I was big. I was not 20 pounds, I was morbidly obese. I used to hate it when I'd see that, morbidly obese. Like, really? Is that true? If you only look at yourself from here up, it doesn't look quite so bad.

But I knew what I was doing in secret. I knew that I was most comfortable eating alone, because I could eat how I wanted to eat. Nobody judging me, nobody looking at me. And nobody could understand why I gained so much weight, because they never saw me eat.

Dr. Paul: Yeah. It's like when I would go to parties, back when I was drinking. I would pre-drink, so at the party I would just sip. And then I would do a lot of drinking after.

Karen: Exactly. Same with food. And so in 2003, a woman came into where I worked. She had lost a lot of weight, and I asked her how. She told me she was involved in a community-based program, a 12-step program for food. And I started it. I started it that day. And it eliminated grains and sugars. You ate certain amounts, three times a day. You don't eat in between meals. You weigh and measure every meal without exception. And that's what I did.

I did that from 2003 to 2008. And I lost all my weight. I was at a normal weight. There was no craving. I was involved in a community-based support group. And pretty soon the thinking started to return that there must be another way to do this.

Dr. Paul: Maybe you could eat it safely again. That sugar and grain, perhaps.

Karen: Yeah. Or, maybe just not be so structured. Maybe just be able to weigh and measure when I wanted to. So I started getting discontented, which is always what precedes any of us.

Dr. Paul: Relapse.

Karen: Yeah. “Things aren’t like I want.” So that was in 2012, and I made a decision to leave. And I did. And I joined. Another community-based food program that was very strong on the actions of recovery, but you could eat in moderation. And many, many people can. Just like some people who are drinking very heavy can make a decision to stop drinking, and they do. And then there’s the rest that can’t.

I don’t know too many social heroin users. People usually don’t go to crack houses to visit. So there’s not a lot of social that goes with those. If you're using those drugs, there’s usually an issue. Just assume there’s an issue.

Dr. Paul: But all my friends do it!

Karen: Right. So in 2012, I started practicing a different program. And between 2012 and 2014, I gained 145 pounds.

Dr. Paul: Everything you’d lost and then some.

Karen: Yep. Well, no. I actually didn’t gain as much as I weighed back in the beginning. And working a program of recovery. Really staying involved. Doing a lot of service work. Doing all the things that are supposed to support recovery, except I was eating grains and sugars. And I gained all that weight.

During that time, I developed an internal bleed that they couldn’t figure out what was causing the problem. We were out of town, down in Lake Tahoe. I went into the urgent care because I was feeling really weak and out of breath. Come to find out my hemoglobin was 5.

Dr. Paul: Holy!

Karen: I know! I went to an urgent care. No minimizing here.

Dr. Paul: If you went from a normal hemoglobin of 13-14 to 5 very quickly, you would be dead. So you had slowly been bleeding.

Karen: Exactly.

Dr. Paul: And you get down to 5, you had to have zero energy and zero stamina.

Karen: Zero energy. I was short of breath. I couldn't walk from here to you without being out breath.

Dr. Paul: You can't carry enough oxygen.

Karen: Exactly. So we went to the urgent care, and the urgent care said, "You need to go to a hospital." And so we did. This wonderful old crusty doc said, oh my God, you are anemic. And we don't know what's going on. But they sent me. Gave me blood. It was an external bleed, not internal. So that's why they were having trouble finding out what was wrong.

And then I had one more episode like that. My physician, who is working with me. I'm physically depleted. I'm extremely obese. I'm so weak, I could work an hour and sleep an hour. Work an hour, sleep an hour. My ferritin was rock bottom.

Dr. Paul: Iron depleted.

Karen: In very bad shape. I remember thinking, this is why people die, why they're ok with dying, because it's an effort to get from the bed to the bathroom.

Dr. Paul: You're so, almost oblivious.

Karen: Yeah. So I had one more bleed where they did another few transfusions. They sent me to blood specialists. They didn't know if it was Hodgkin's or leukemia or pancreatitis. My physician said, "Are you drinking? Your liver had some abnormalities." Which, yeah. I would imagine it has one or two.

Dr. Paul: Fatty liver.

Karen: And so finally they did an exploratory. They knew I had a hiatal hernia, which ended up being what the bleed was. So it was 10 cm. So my stomach was up.

Dr. Paul: Oh wow. Your stomach was going up into your lungs.

Karen: Right. And the bleed was on the outside of the stomach, was what was causing the bleed. So they were able to do what they do to repair that.

So I'm in the hospital. I'm weighing in at 280-290 pounds. I'm depleted. Totally depleted. I had a fabulous physician. I just adore him because he didn't give up on me. And he had watched me be a normal weight, and watched me get up to this weight.

So during the surgery, they lost me twice and resuscitated me. And when they went out and saw Lisa and my oldest son, David, they had tried to do the surgery laparoscopically. But because of how obese I was, my abdomen was just so huge that they couldn't do it. So they had to cut me open. He just told Lisa, "Her weight is killing her. We almost lost her because of obesity. Not heroin addiction. No alcoholism. Obesity."

So after the surgery, I was in the hospital about 10 days. And the first couple of days I could barely move. It was a huge surgery. They had told me that I couldn't eat anything. And other than, they have IVs. And they would start introducing liquids, or very soft food because it could rupture this surgery that he had just completed.

Dr. Paul: Right. Very delicate surgery.

Karen: Yeah. Not a bypass. It wasn't any of that. It had to do with this hernia. So I got up, and I started walking around with my walker. And I was a nurse. I know where nurses hide their food. Nurses eat, a lot.

Dr. Paul: Yeah, crackers and peanut butter. Graham crackers and peanut butter.

Karen: So I'm walking. Here am I now, I'm much more vibrant than I was then. I mean, I could barely walk. So I'm walking around, and I find food. And I'm eating it, knowing that it could rupture that surgery. I had tears running down my face. I was 30 years clean and sober. And I couldn't believe.

I was so ashamed. And I felt so alone. That I couldn't tell anybody that I was willing to kill myself with food. And that I couldn't stop. I couldn't not eat. And every addict knows that. You don't want to use, and you use. You don't want to eat, and you eat. You don't want to drink, and you drink. That is the story of addiction.

Dr. Paul: Yeah. I have a similar story, actually. I'm in that journey where I know I'm an alcoholic and I'm trying to quit alcohol. And I'm trying everything. I'm trying everything I can imagine. So I'm on Antabuse at this point. You've probably treated people with this with your physicians, right? So I'm on Antabuse, which makes you really sick if you drink. And I'm pretty good at taking it, because I want to quit. So I'm taking my Antabuse. I'm going to 12-step meetings. Or a program. We're not supposed to say that.

I'm sitting outside the meeting with a 6-pack, and I'm drinking. I can't have the courage, and I'm feeling that shame, and I'm turning beet red because that's what happens when you drink when you're on Antabuse. My heart is starting to pound out of my chest, thinking how insane is this? How absolutely insane. The insanity of that is just mind boggling. But that's addiction, and that's craving.

How did you then get free? You've got some time now where you've got a different approach to food?

Karen: Right. I was crying. And so alone. And I think that was the beginning of my experience, there's a component of agony that goes prior to surrender. And the biggest mistake most of us make is we keep the person away from the agony. We have to, I had to come to my own point of agony. And that's been true in every piece of it.

So that was the beginning. I didn't get back into any kind of recovery with the food until March of 15. So it was another 6 or 7 months. But since March 15 now I've been back. And I do a very structured program. I only eat three meals a day. I weigh and measure those meals. I eat vegetables, protein, and a measured amount of fat. It's all measured out. I do that no matter what.

Dr. Paul: Yeah. I've been to a restaurant with you more than once. And you bring your little containers.

Karen: I flip my scale out.

Dr. Paul: Yep. You weigh stuff on your scale. You're faithful.

Karen: Well I never worried what people thought when I was at the buffet, right? And my rear end was a big screen TV. I never worried then. So now, it's just what I do. And that's just what I do. I don't eat any grains, and I don't eat any sugars.

I could not even, during that period of time, I was trying to eat healthy. It wasn't that I wasn't wanting to be healthy. I was trying to eat brown rice, and quinoa, and vegetables. And the right things. But even brown rice and quinoa and those would start me off. It would take a little longer. That's why I know there's something that happens in my body when you introduce grains and sugar. And it sets up a craving for more. And sooner or later, I give into it.

So, the best solution is not to eat them. And then without that, I don't have the craving. Then the different programs that people participate in is what helps with the obsession. The thinking that precedes any drinking, using, eating. The thinking. What happens in here.

And that's why I do the work that I do. If the solution to all of this was stop, slap a cop. You will stop. It's that simple.

Dr. Paul: Slap a cop! No, don't do that.

Karen: Because if that's the solution, don't drink or use or eat. Slap a cop, because they will lock you up. And I'm telling you, you will not drink, use, or eat.

Dr. Paul: You're locked up.

Karen: That's right. But that's not enough. Something has to change. And that's why the work that I do. Getting into, not getting rid of my childhood, but integrating my whole life experience into the now.

This is what happened. This is how I reenact it, and act it out. But these are the tools to modulate my own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Dr. Paul: Yeah. So do you credit the 20 concepts, that program that you're helping people walk through with a lot of taking that final step for yourself maybe?

Karen: Yes. 10 years ago I walked into Wisdom and Recovery. And I walked in because I was 25 years clean and sober, and I couldn't connect with another human being on an intimate level without being mean. It's that simple. When people got close, for me, getting close was painful. So when people got close, I would sabotage. I thought there was something bad or wrong about me. I had the imposter syndrome. Like I didn't deserve my life. I had all of these thoughts and behaviors that were really creating, would have been the end of another relationship. And that's what brought me into Wisdom and Recovery.

I had heard Julie, she had come and talked to my staff at a place I worked 15 years ago. And I remember listening to her, and I thought, when I'm ready, if I ever am to do that work...Because it's not rocket science. If you grow up in a home, not even deliberately, if you have a parent that dies, that fractures that connection, the bonding.

We know now how important it is for a mom to bond with her baby the minute that baby is born. Or if you're adopted, right? So you hear your mom's voice. You're in her body during this whole time. And then you're removed. Even though you're going to a wonderful place. It's not blaming parents. The real problem is neglect. Abuse. Death. Absence. Addiction. That's the real issue.

Parents do what they do because they do what they do. But I am done with that. This is about regaining me, becoming your own loving parent. Guiding myself. Not having my child or adolescent in charge of this organism. Because I'll tell you, when that happens, there is chaos. There needs to be an adult on board that is in charge of what goes on. Adult responsibility is one of the concepts. It's non-negotiable.

Dr. Paul: Love that one!

Karen: And when I talk to my folks, if they're not willing to do that, tolerate the discomfort of change, I'm not for you. Suffer. Go on.

Dr. Paul: When you're ready for change, there's a program for you.

Karen: There is. And so this is what that gave me. I was clean and sober. I got into abstinence with the food. But I had no sense of wellbeing. I watched other people, and they seemed like they could be happy. They could be contented with their lives. It was like, I was always paddling in water. It was like I was never quite there.

I told Lisa not long ago. I said, I think that I experienced wellbeing. You know?

Dr. Paul: It's a spiritual thing almost.

Karen: I thought, oh my God!

Dr. Paul: That serenity thing you hear about. What the heck is that?

Karen: Yes. And that's in spite of what's going on in my life.

Dr. Paul: Yeah.

Karen: That's in spite of having kids that are using. Or issues at work. Or financial issues. In spite of being able to match calamity with serenity. I'm ok with me. And I have the tools to face life on life's terms. I have the tools.

That's what, with the 20 concepts, added to. They added peace. Because there was so much going on in my brain that I didn't even understand. We know more about our cars than we know about our body.

Dr. Paul: They come with a manual. Kids don't come with a manual.

Karen: Yeah. And we jump into our body every morning not knowing how to read the gauges. We don't know when we're tilting. We don't know when we're triggered. And then if we do, we don't know what to do about it.

So what we deal with is post traumatic stress from attachment as a young child. Inconsistent parenting for whatever reason. It can be illness. It can be divorce. It can be death. It can be abuse. It can be neglect. Who did it is not the issue. It's what do I do about it now.

Dr. Paul: And that's the 20 concepts.

Karen: That's the 20 concepts.

Dr. Paul: Folks, this is powerful stuff. And there's more on this summit about this. And there's the book, *Knowing How*, that you teach from. And the coursework that you're providing. It's available both online and in person. It's transformative. It's absolutely life changing.

I was curious. I'm going to throw you just a curveball question. It just popped into my head. When I heard you speak on another topic in the past, I was so touched by it. A lot of people struggle with the concept of God and spirituality. Because the serenity thing doesn't seem to happen unless that part gets somehow figured out. Do you have any thoughts that we can share with our viewers? Because I'm sure somebody else is struggling with that whole idea.

Karen: Well, that's a big topic.

Dr. Paul: I caught you off guard on that one. Sorry.

Karen: So, let me say I've always known that there's something powerful at play here. I just hated it. I thought, "How could there be a loving God who watches this really bad stuff happen. How?"

Dr. Paul: Yeah, it makes no sense.

Karen: It makes no sense. So it has been a very long process of getting from here to here. And I don't consider myself, I know I'm not a religious person. I'm not even sure where I am on that spectrum from agnostic to having some kind of belief in a power.

But this is the definition I have, and this works for me. And I think that's the piece that we have in this day and age. The opportunity to find your own, what is it? Is it principles that you can dedicate your life to? Is it an idea. Love your neighbor as yourself, do unto others as you want them to do unto you.

Everybody seems like, like I said, we all get dedicated to something. Everybody does. And people say, "I'm not dedicated to anything." Oh yeah. You're dedicated to something. You're either dedicated to doing nothing, or you're dedicated to doing something. But believe me, you are dedicated. Because you're putting your life on it.

Dr. Paul: Yeah. We're all living 24 hours a day doing something.

Karen: That's right. So this is my idea. This is what I finally came to. Orchestrator of the universe where everybody is a winner, even the people I don't think deserve it. The reason I had to include them is because if this power is as limited as I am, that he or she or it would decide who gets it and who doesn't, then who needs that? I've got a million people just like that. Right? So I could have one of them be it. It has to be something that's bigger than my mind.

So orchestrator of the universe where everybody is a winner, even the people I think don't deserve it. So that includes the girl that killed my step-daughter. That includes everybody.

Dr. Paul: That's a tough one.

Karen: It doesn't mean I like her. It doesn't mean I forgive her. That's a whole nother subject. I don't have to forgive people. I have to get at peace with things.

So how this came to be for me really quickly is my one son Joe, who was missing in action with the addiction and I started working around getting help regarding my own total grief and loss about not having him in my life. And I actually have the picture of this on my phone as my screen saver. So a year ago, right about now, June 6th. June 4th, or 5th, or 6th.

He sent me a text, and the tire on their RV that was a piece of crap RV. We're not talking a nice RV. We're talking, they took 600 pounds of garbage out of that RV when they got clean. So it was a mess. He sent me a picture of the tire. "We need a tire. Would you?..." And I hadn't heard much from him. And I said, "My grandson was getting married that weekend. I'll get back to you on Monday, which, in itself is a miracle that I was able to do that. I hope you're safe," blah, blah, blah.

So on Monday, my oldest son David. And those two boys were very close. This is where that orchestrator of the universe. Because see, I want to be the orchestrator of the universe. I want to decide when stuff happens, how it happens, who does it.

So that Monday, I texted David and I said, would you run by? They told me where they were at. See if this RV is actually there. And he went. And those two boys had used together for many years. And David got clean, and there was bad blood between them. They hadn't talked in 6 years. Well, none of us had talked to Joe because he was MIA.

So David found the RV. Took a picture of the tire, and sent it to me. Knocked on it, of course, but nobody answered. And he gets back in his car. And Joe walks by the car. And David gets out, and he said, "Joe-Joe?" And Joe said, "David?" Joe was coming down. He hadn't had any heroin. He was in bad shape. He's 5-foot 11, and he weighed maybe 130 pounds. Maybe. He was just skin and bones. And Joe ended up sobbing into David's arms. That's the orchestrator of the universe, right there.

David said to him, "I'd like to take you away from this, but you're the only one that can pull that trigger." And that was on a Monday. And on Wednesday, David stopped by to see him again. Again, the orchestrator of the universe. And David talked to him. Bought him a pack of smokes. Got him a Diet Coke. Got him some food. And that night, Joe texted David, and said, "I'm willing." And we got him into treatment the next day.

He's healthy. Like I said, him and I were on the phone today talking about the last present he gave me was probably 8 years ago, and it was a stolen piece of

merchandise. So the point of all of that is, with this idea of spirituality, is I would have orchestrated that all different. And instead, the very person that could be there for Joe was.

Dr. Paul: Yeah. The only person probably that could have reached him.

Karen: Right. And the orchestrator of the universe, where everybody is a winner, even the people I think don't deserve it...So that's out of my job description on who gets it and who doesn't. My job is to make sure it's available for whoever wants it. That's my job.

Dr. Paul: Perfect. And you are a master at that. Thank you for that. That's helpful. Wondering what kind of closing thoughts would you like to leave our viewers? Imagine, we've got folks watching who are in pain. They don't know where to turn. We've got folks watching who are in their addiction and can't seem to get out of it. And we've got folks watching who have loved ones who are in that spiral, and they don't know what to do. What advice do you have for each of those people?

Karen: That's a really good question. This is what I would say. Every person who has been affected by alcoholism or drug addiction, food addiction, codependency, comes to a point of defeat and agony. It's a point of surrender. And this is what I do know. There is a solution for every single person.

I like the people, it's like feeding an alligator. They're hungry, but they kind of bite you when you try to feed them. That's what working with addiction is like. Because there's such a big war that goes on inside of a person. Wanting to quit, and being terrified of quitting.

That's where people, all of us, who probably all of the people who have done this summit, attempt to stand in the gap while a person reaches that point. And so that would be my parting words. There is a solution for you. You are not alone. And even though you don't know why you do some of the things you do, I can tell you there is a reason. There is a reason. And there's knowledge that can help you navigate and negotiate that differently.

That's what I never thought I could do. I never thought I could be different than I was. I used to say I was branded with the way I was raised. We were poor. It was branded. And that is not true. We are not doomed to repeat.

So if, and I say, there's always an if. If you're willing to make the commitment and extend the effort necessary, there is a solution. If you're looking for magic,

not going to happen. There's no magic. This is real. And you might break a sweat doing it. So it takes effort and commitment. I just can't let addiction be the winner.

Dr. Paul: No. You've conquered a lot, from your childhood and all that trauma. To multiple addictions. Your own personal, in your family, and now you're just giving back. So you are a blessing to so many. I've heard you speak and just sort of bless a huge crowd of people, eating up every word that you say.

This was a little more personal and tough. So I know you were hesitant to come on and share that deeply. Thank you. I know, if you've been touched by the story here, just realize. We just scratched the surface of the power that's in this woman. Because she will provide you the solution piece when you're ready. So if you're watching this and you're ready, how do people get in touch with the program that you're teaching right now?

Karen: Wisdom and Recovery you can go to WisdomandRecovery.com. And also on that website is the phone number to our office. We have a base in San Diego, as well as a base here in Portland. And we are doing a lot of our classes online. So we do them by using a video classroom, which, thank God for the 20th century, or 21st century. Thank God that we have all these things available now.

So you can go to WisdomandRecovery.com and there's a phone number there. And there's also going to be the ability to email us. And you can email me at Karen@WisdomandRecovery.com

Dr. Paul: That's fantastic. Thanks for watching this episode of the Addiction Spectrum. I'm Dr. Paul. Karen, thank you so much.

Karen: Thank you.

Dr. Paul: This was a real gift to our community. There will be ways to connect and stay connected.